that the level of development of clusters in our country remains minute. A small number of enterprises in Serbia are involved in cluster operations – slightly less than 2% of domestic companies and only 3% of the workforce [15]. For the purposes of comparison, if 45.4% of the total employment is related to the SMEs [9], then we can unambiguously conclude that enterprises in Serbia insufficiently participate in cluster networking. According to the data from the Global CompetitivenessReport, by cluster development Serbia ranked 117th in 2009, which is a drop of its ranking compared to 2008 [14].

The educational structure of the population is of particular importance in research activities aimed at finding opportunities for the establishment and development of clusters. This is particularly important since in the educational structure of the population aged 15 and over (according to data from 2002), completed high school is the most common level of education with 41.1% of the population, the second most common being primary education – with 23.9% (mostly elderly people). In the total population, 6.6% are those with higher education, and 4.5% are those with two or three-year post-secondary degrees [10]. In 2009, a slight increase in all levels of education is noticeable, except the primary education, which endured a slight decrease in its share out of total.

Findings and implications. The survey has shown that the most common level of education in the analysed clusters is congruent with the dominant educational level in Serbia. Most employees have a high school diploma – 65.39%. The highest level of education is represented in 15.92% of the surveyed sample. The average percentage of workers with primary education is 18, 68% (Figure 1).

If we observe the management of companies involved in surveyed clusters, then we see a significant preponderance of highly educated staff, which is the most suitable for managerial positions. This level of qualifications is possessed by managers in the surveyed sample in the area of nearly 60%. With the addition of 18.92% for the post-secondary two-year education, the exact sum of these two categories is 77.02%. Secondary education is possessed by 20.28% of the sample.

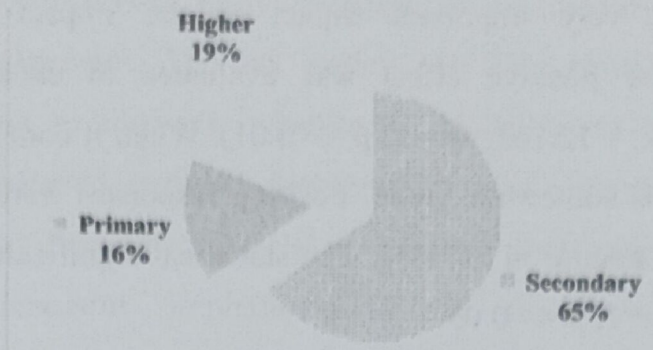

Figure 1 – Structure of qualifications of employees

Similarly, if we analyse the participation of enterprises in the cluster by level of education, the following indicators have been obtained: the majority of employees with primary education is in 6% of the enterprises; with a majority of employees with secondary education there is 50.7%, and with a majority of employees with higher education there is 7.5 % of enterprises. Equal number of employees from all three levels of education figures in 35.8% of companies (hi-k. = 38 851, df = 3, p <= 0.01). Presented survey results, as well as the fact that clusters operate in traditional sectors of the economy of Serbia (metalworking, automotive, wood, textile and plastics industries) fully confirm the first two hypotheses of this survey.

The views of respondents regarding the impact of clusters on the increase of the level of training and qualifications of employees are affirmative in 62.16% of cases. Within the clusters, scientific and research institutions can be found either as full members, or as support. One such example is the Faculty of Forestry in Belgrade, which is an equal member of the cluster *Agency for Wood* [*Agencija za drvo*]. This implies that in addition to information exchange within the cluster, there is transfer of knowledge, complementary skills and the overall experiential potential.

When it comes to consulting, over 80% of respondents uses it occasionally or continuously (hi-k.=21.808, df = 2, p <= 0.01). This data indicates that there is understanding of the importance of resources rationalization.

The next very important aspect is the impact of clusters on the productivity. The positive effect was evaluated to exist by 74.33% of the respondents (hi-k. = 12.162, df = 1, p <= 0.01). When it comes to innovations, then this percentage is somewhat lower. Positive responses were found in 63.52% of the sample, and neutral in 36.48%. The statistical significance of this indicator is: hi-k. = 5.405, df = 1, p <= 0.05.

In terms of the adopted standards of quality, only half of the respondents stated that their companies have adopted quality standards (52.70%). On the other hand, a slightly higher percentage (70.28%) plans to introduce quality systems in the subsequent three years (hi-k. = 13.928, df = 1, p <= 0.01).

Also, among the necessary elements for the development of competitive capacity of enterprises, the respondents ranked at the top positions the following: the use of modern technological solutions and equipment, standardization of the quality of operations and continuous improvement of knowledge and skills of both the management and the employees.

Given the fact that the respondents have emphasized the use of modern technology solutions, quality of business operations and continuous improvement of knowledge – of both the leadership and the employees, we can conclude that they have comprehended the importance of orientation to know-how. A cluster that connects such SMEs makes them organizations of learning, further stressing knowledge, which is an all-out modern trend. The results of our study stated above fully confirm our third working hypothesis.

Conclusion. The cluster policy has to be one of the priority developmental policies of Serbia considering that the experience of developed countries has shown that business clusters are carriers of the prosperity of national economies through increased productivity, stimulation of hi-tech innovations, improvement of systems of quality and raising of the competitiveness level of its members. Consequently, the SME sector should have to be regarded as the solution to the long-term economic growth, and not as part of the problem.

Escalation in competitiveness brings a surge in profitability, the volume of investment and employment. The tax policy can also stimulate employment. Clusters also represent an adequate response to globalization and become an effective lever of balanced regional development of a country.

In Serbia, apart from the material conditions, there are adequate human resources for the successful implementation of the policy of business clustering. The highly trained and qualified workforce and management structure, along with adequate macroeconomic policy development, are the prerequisites on which the economy can achieve a significant competitive advantage in international markets. Management is nowadays compelled to follow a new business formula that bases competitive success on the enhanced performance of more tasks with fewer resources. Emphasis is given to the strategies of competence, openness, association and cooperation with others, which is exactly what business clustering offers.

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